

Saber Strike 2011 kicks off in Latvia

By U.S. Army Europe Public Affairs

Oct. 20, 2010

ADAZI TRAINING AREA, Latvia -- The flags of four nations bonded by the war in Afghanistan waved side by side during the opening ceremony here for exercise Saber Strike 2011, Oct. 18, even as soldiers in nearby training lanes prepared their weapons, improved training sites, and started training together.

The ceremony marked the beginning of several weeks of multinational training aimed at improving interoperability among the participating forces and preparing Latvian, Estonian, Lithuanian and U.S. troops for upcoming deployments in support of the International Security Assistance Forces in Afghanistan.

Saber Strike, which will run through Oct. 29, is the first of what expected is to be an ongoing cooperative training effort between the four nations, and is intended to increase the combat readiness of forces preparing to deploy in support of the ISAF, said Col. Keith Sledd, the exercise's co-director.

The exercise includes a command post exercise, a field training exercise and situational training exercises aimed at helping participating countries to operate more effectively together. Exercise officials said the tasks trained during Saber Strike are specifically designed to prepare the troops for operations in Afghanistan, and include improvised explosive device defeat training, convoy and patrol operations, and cordon-and-search operations.

The exercise also gives Soldiers from the 56th Stryker Brigade Combat Team of the Pennsylvania Army National Guard, as well as the 16th Sustainment Brigade, 172nd Infantry Brigade and other U.S. Army Europe units an opportunity to see and help further the relationships among the participating forces.

"Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia have each contributed significantly to the International Security Assistance Forces in Afghanistan as well as other

international operations over the years. Each nation is a key regional partner, and this exercise reflects the great strategic partnership and close relationship that the U.S. Army has with each of the Baltic state militaries,” said Sledd.

“The Saber Strike exercise benefits each nation involved by improving interoperability ..., exercising multinational command and control, improving our joint operational capabilities, and strengthening our regional partnerships,” the colonel added. “Each nation reaps significant benefits from (these) cooperative training efforts by improving the abilities of regional partners.”

Some exercise participants have already found out that despite language barriers and cultural differences, Soldiers have a lot in common, but that multinational training gives them fresh perspectives on the ways they do many things.

“We have the same goals, but it’s nice to hear a different point of view, as opposed to, ‘We always did it this way’ ..., ‘This is the way it’s written,’ ‘This is doctrine,’ ‘This is regulation,’ said Sgt. 1st Class Sean Cook, an ammunition specialist for the 23rd Ordnance Company. The Latvians are very ‘user-friendly;’ they like to change things up and try different things, and it really makes for a better experience.”